

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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State superintendent releases statement on SB/AB 411

MADISON — State Superintendent Jill Underly issued the following statement today relating to SB/AB 411, which is being discussed at the Joint Committee on Education public hearing this morning.

“We rely on educators to teach our kids in a way that is accurate and honest. Through training and experience, teachers learn to support students as they approach rigorous and challenging subject matters. Our kids benefit greatly from that interaction. If we are being honest with ourselves, at one point or another, all of us have as well.

“Unfortunately, in these bills, we’re not talking about how to improve teaching and learning. We are again focused on issues that distract and divide our communities, using our public schools as the vehicle. These bills present issues that get nowhere close to supporting our kids or their immediate needs. In fact, nothing about either of these proposals gets anywhere close to a strategy for improving schools. They will not grow relationships between teachers and students, improve instruction, deepen understanding and trust from families, or advance the economic well-being of our communities. These bills are message platforms that seek to advance a belief that we cannot handle a challenging issue within a school; that teachers cannot be trusted to help kids think critically about what they see, hear, and read.

“As a lifelong educator and former school district administrator from a rural school district, I can tell you that we handle difficult conversations every day, and that our inability to manage these interactions could not be farther from the truth. We can and should have conversations about issues from our country’s history, like chattel slavery, race- and gender-based discrimination, and even genocide. We have conversations about harassment and discrimination because of actions among and between students. We take these conversations seriously because it prepares students for life, and it prepares them for their place in a just and civil society. Educators do not need to accuse a student of playing a part in this history to teach them about its factual existence. Ignoring these historic events does not change them or make them go away. It does a gross disservice to our kids and their future. We’re better than this.”

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NOTE: This news release is available electronically at <https://dpi.wi.gov/news/releases/2021/jill-underly-statement-senate-bill-411>.